# Free Telecourse Series

2005-2006 NASDSE Satellite Conference Series

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Division of Special Education will once again sponsor a series of interactive satellite conferences produced by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). DESE has purchased this series from NASDSE and is offering it free of charge to sites throughout Missouri.

Getting the Most Out of Your Partnerships:
Using Knowledge Management and Communities of Practice
October 19, 2005 - 12:00-2:00 p.m.
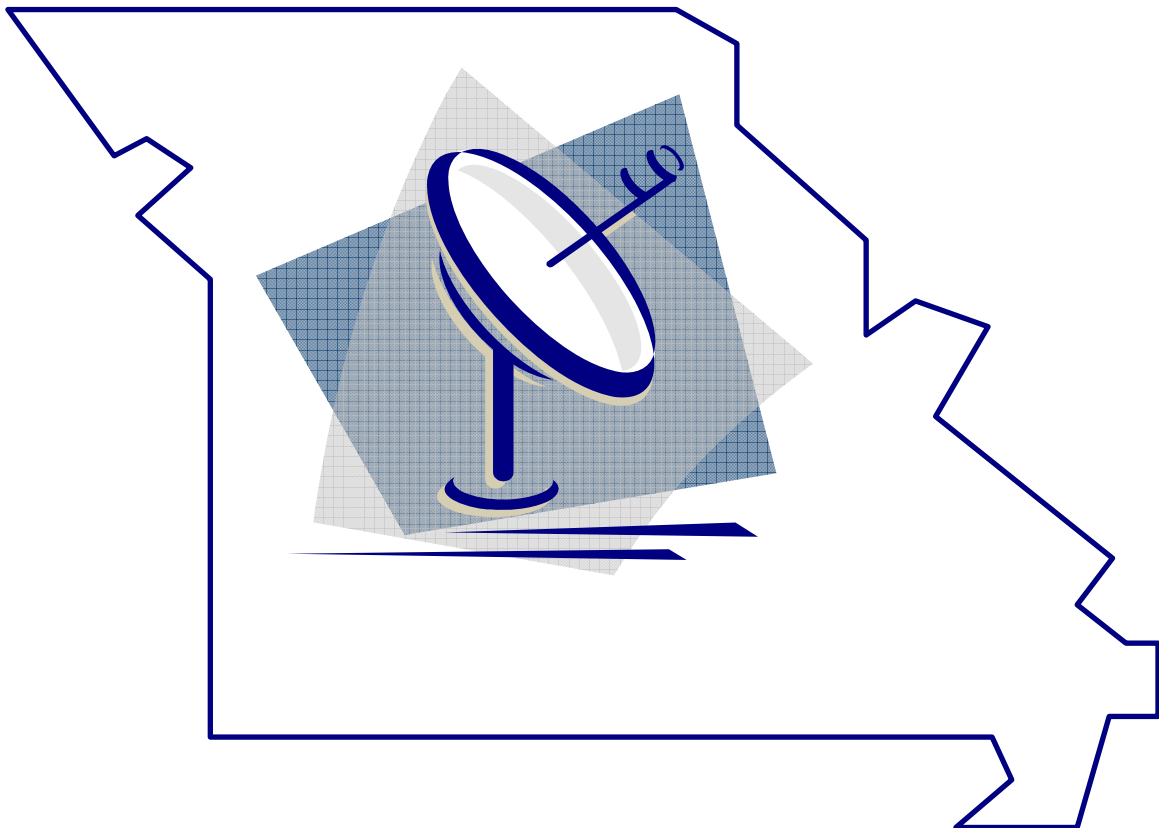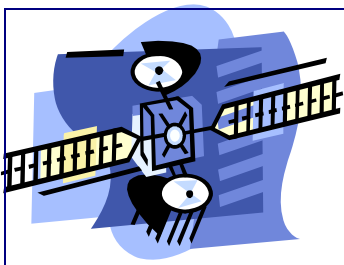
TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Getting the Most Out of Your Partnerships: Using Knowledge Management and Communities of Practice

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

TIME: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EDT
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. CDT
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. MDT
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. PDT

TEST TIME: None

SATELLITE: IA-6
BAND: C-BAND
TRANSPONDER: 13
CHANNEL: 13
POLARITY: VERTICAL
AUDIO: 6.2 / 6.8 MHZ
LOCATION: 93° WEST LONGITUDE
FREQUENCY: 3960 MHZ

TECHNICAL TROUBLE NUMBER (Day of the program only)
724-337-1808

Knowledge Management

> The investment in knowledge pays the biggest dividend.
> *Ben Franklin*
>
> Using knowledge generated through research, data and experience is most likely to have a significant, wide-scale, and long-lasting impact on student outcomes
> *National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA)*

Persistent problems, those that seem to defy solution, are nothing new. When we begin chatting with a parent or educator from another state or another school district, we soon recognize that under the exchange of program names and the bureaucratic process discussions, we recognize the same issues.

In recent years, we have made significant strides in addressing persistent problems through data-based decision making. This systematic inquiry based on evidence of effectiveness has helped us identify real change and discover the leverage points where simple changes may significantly alter outcomes.
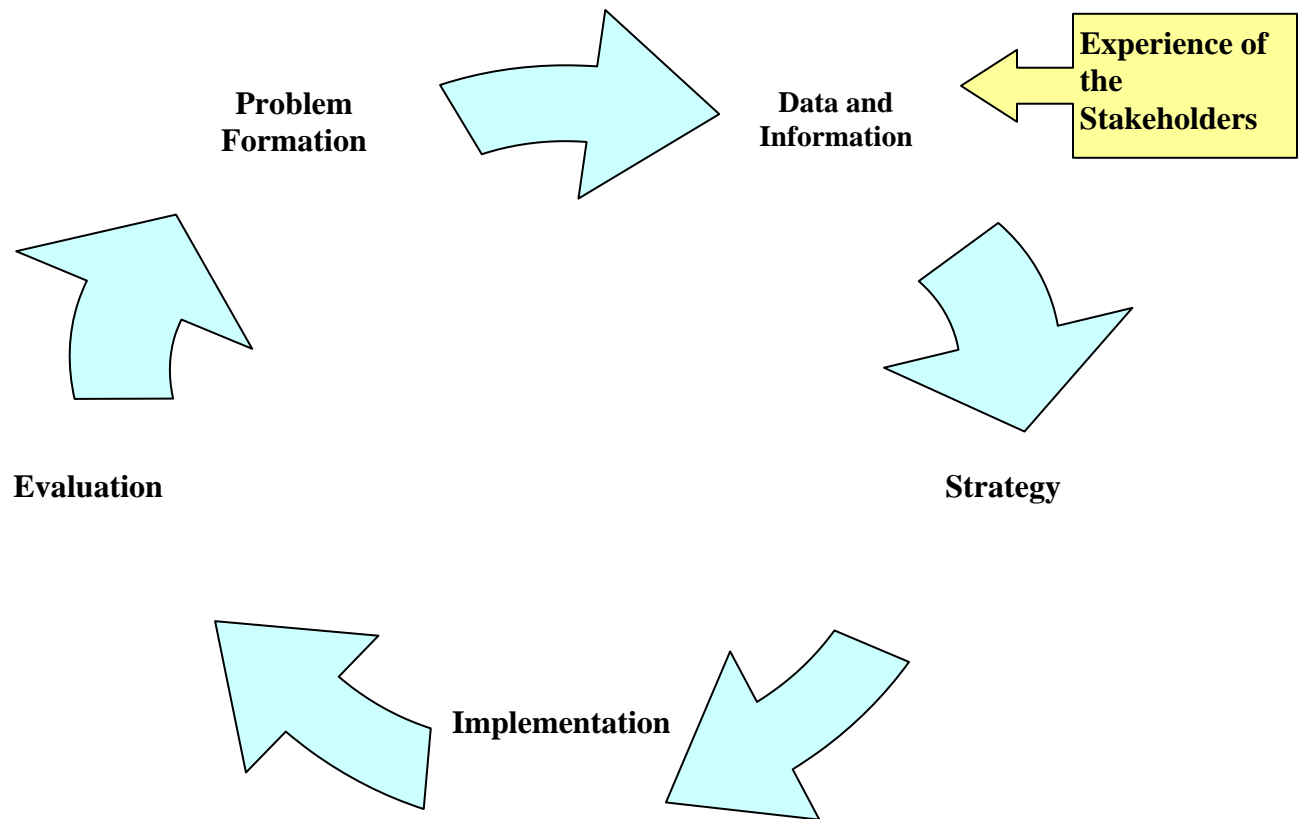
Now, we have another approach that adds even more power to our data-based strategies. For too long, we have ignored one of the most valuable resources in facing persistent problems; the expertise of those that do the work. Knowledge management, a new approach to identifying options and choosing among alternatives, holds significant promise for education. Drawing on the expertise of the business field, organizations that adopt knowledge management (KM) approaches make all the sources of knowledge apparent and seek to apply them to the situations that need new solutions.

KM is a means to a better end, it is not an end in itself. KM devotees believe that collecting information without a frame for using it to improve situations is not knowledge. Likewise, data without a context for understanding the data is not knowledge. KM advocates believe that when data and information are combined with experience, we have the potential to create personal meaning and build new, useable knowledge.

In addressing persistent problems, KM experts caution that it is insufficient to have data, information or even new knowledge, if the strategies that we choose are not aligned with our new learning. Yet, when data, information, knowledge and experience are crafted into a salient strategy that can be communicated easily to those who will be doing the implementation, we may be able to systematically address the multiple issues that combine to create persistent problems.

Persistent problems most often cannot be addressed in just one attempt. In a well designed knowledge management approach, the good data, clear information and important stakeholder groups combine to create powerful new approaches to deal with today's situations and envision the future.

Knowledge Management: Using Stakeholder Experiences to Design Better Strategies

Problem
Formation

Data and
Information

Experience of
the
Stakeholders

Strategy

Implementation

Evaluation

NASDSE Satellite Conference Handout
September 21, 2005

Communities of Practice

The concept of Communities of Practice (CoP) has its roots in the educational theory of situated learning, but to date has been almost exclusively applied to organizational development. According to Etienne Wenger and Bill Snyder, leaders in the field of learning theory, communities of practice can drive strategy, solve problems, promote the spread of best practices, develop members' professional skills, and help organizations recruit and retain talent.

> *Communities of Practice are groups of people who share expertise and passion about a topic and interact on an ongoing basis to further their learning in this domain. Communities of Practice members typically solve problems, discuss insights and share information. Communities of Practice also develop tools and frameworks that become part of a common knowledge of the community. And over time, these mutual interactions and relationships build up a shared body of knowledge and a sense of identity.*
>
> *Wenger & Snyder, 2000*

According to Wenger (1998), Communities of practice have three dimensions:

Domain -- Communities of practice organize around a *domain* of knowledge that gives members a sense of joint enterprise. Members identify with the domain and with each other. (You can substitute domain and call it issue, topic, challenge, goal, etc.)

Community -- Members function as a *community* through collective engagements that unite members into a social entity. They interact regularly and engage in joint activities that build trust and a common identity.

Practice -- Communities of practice build their capability through their *practice*. They develop a shared language and a shared set of resources that represent the collective knowledge of the community. This shared knowledge serves as a foundation for future learning.

Education leaders believe that the 'communities' approach is the most promising strategy to address the persistent problem of bringing initiatives 'to scale'. When different stakeholder groups are joined in a 'community', an affiliation develops that supports the spread of successful strategies and the creation of new knowledge. Useful information, training and innovation are quickly transferred from colleague to colleague. Policy, research and practice documents pick up meaning as they are shared and translated into practice by the community members. And, the gap between 'knowing' and 'doing' is lessened or eliminated when it is considered in the context of the work at hand and collegially pursued with others sharing the same challenges.

Community of Practice theory provides a general framework for building knowledge together across roles, divisions, and organizations to solve problems and improve practice. However, the process that we are describing will have to be viewed and adapted to your own unique context in order to be meaningful (i.e. state level, local level, district level, school level). Communities of practice are becoming more widely used and are often referred to by different names depending on the implementers. Because of this, it is important to not focus on the name used but on the overall concept as a new way of working.

'Communities' provide a unique strategy to:

- To unite all stakeholders into one unified community that moves strategically toward greater systemic impact at the state and local level.
- To promote interaction and affiliation around shared issues.
- To facilitate systemic change and cultural shift toward greater and more meaningful cross-stakeholder involvement.

Communities are:

- A 'way of working'
- Building natural bonds that form between people who share common work
- Organizing around common goals
- Being committed to using what we know
- Moving from the 'knowing' to the 'doing'
- Being open, inviting and supportive of others 'doing the work
- Sharing learning within and across organizations, agencies and roles
- Creating new knowledge grounded in 'doing the work'

Why Do We Need to Find a New Way of Working Together?

We have a 'knowing and doing' gap.

- 'Knowing isn't doing'!
- Practices often do not transfer across organizations or across sites within the same organization

We need to move promising strategies 'to scale'.

- Pockets of excellence persist!
- Many sites need direct and ongoing support to adopt practices
- It is unlikely that we will have sufficient TA resources to provide direct assistance to all that will need it

**We have an ongoing need for security when undertaking change.**

- Implementers are people first!
- Fear limits the ability of people to turn knowledge into action
- People need support to make changes
- In the absence of support, change does not go deep
- In the absence of support, backsliding is common

Problems are complex and interrelated.

- We need to find a course of action within the complexity
- We need to be able to operate at the intersection of research, policy, and practice

NASDSE believes that communities can transform practice by building on sharing and relationships then channeling the energy toward systems change. These *transformational communities* are characterized by:

- Learning how to move from 'knowing' to 'doing'
- Translating learning to policy
- Encouraging investments that will move the work
- Integrated systems that often cross-organization, cross-role, cross-site
- Recognizing the value of all contributions for a complete and effective approach
- Creating new relationships between policymakers, researchers and implementers
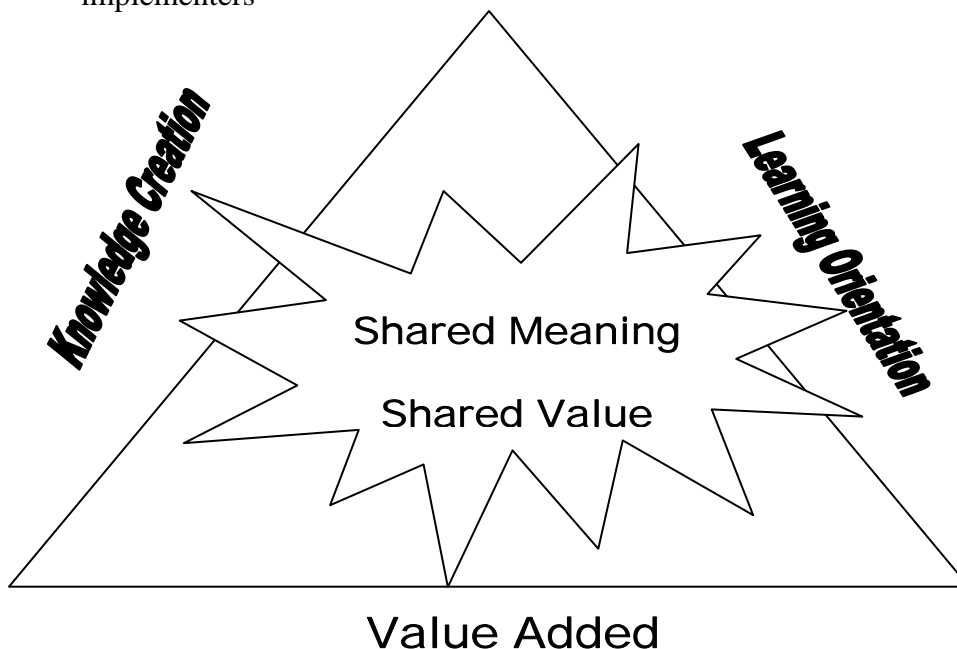
For more on the IDEA Partnership at NASDSE visit http://www.ideapartnership.org and for more information on the IDEA Partnership communities of practice work visit http://www.ideapartnership.org/partnership1.cfm

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